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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 TASHKENT 001079

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SUBJECT: FM HARSHLY CRITICIZES PRESIDENT'S REMARKS ON
UZBEKISTAN'S HUMAN RIGHTS SITUATION, SAYS U.S. NOT READY
FOR CONSTRUCTIVE RELATIONSHIP

Classified By: CDA BRAD HANSON, FOR REASONS 1.4 (B, D)

11. (C) Summary: On June 6, Foreign Minister Vladimir Norov registered the Government's deep displeasure with President Bush's criticism of Uzbekistan's human rights practices in his June 5 speech at the Prague Conference on Democracy and Security. Norov said that these comments demonstrate that despite the Government of Uzbekistan's best efforts, the United States is not ready to engage in a constructive relationship with Uzbekistan. Norov said that U.S. officials single out Uzbekistan for criticism, downplaying or ignoring any progress in human rights. In contrast, he said, the USG praises other countries' progress, even if it is questionable. Charge said that President Bush's comments on Uzbekistan in Prague are accurate, and that human rights issues are a legitimate topic of discussion. Norov's reaction demonstrates yet again that the Uzbek regime cares deeply about its international image and carefully studies comments made about Uzbekistan in the region and elsewhere. End comment.

12. (C) On June 6, Foreign Minister Vladimir Norov used a meeting to discuss the case of Embassy FSN Dmitriy Bityutskiy (septel) to register the Government of Uzbekistan's grave displeasure with President Bush's reference to Uzbekistan in his June 5 speech on human rights at the Prague Conference on Democracy and Security. Norov referred specifically to the President's statement: "The Government of Uzbekistan continues to silence independent voices by jailing human rights activists." Uzbekistan has tried to improve its relationship with the United States, Norov asserted, and has never worked against U.S. interests. President Bush's comments, however, demonstrate again that despite these efforts the United States is not ready for a constructive relationship with Uzbekistan.

13. (C) Norov said that President Bush's remark is but the latest example of a U.S. tendency to criticize perceived wrongs while minimizing or ignoring any progress that Uzbekistan has made in protecting human rights. Furthermore, the President disregarded the fact that activists were jailed not for their human rights activity but for specific violations of the law, thus drawing a broad and inaccurate generalization about Uzbekistan's human rights practices. In contrast, Norov said, U.S. officials are quick to praise even dubious achievements of other Central Asian governments, as evidenced by statements from Ambassador Ordway and A/S Boucher on Kazakhstan's constitutional amendments or PDAS Mann's comments on positive developments in Turkmenistan.

This was evidence, Norov said, of U.S. "double standards." The Foreign Minister also referred disparagingly to some recent alleged comments by Prime Minister Tony Blair to the effect that Uzbekistan needed "educated" imams in its mosques.

¶4. (C) Charge responded that President Bush's criticism of the human rights situation in Uzbekistan is accurate. American diplomats throughout the world discuss human rights with their host governments whenever possible. The President's speech and our efforts to discuss human rights issues with governments around the world demonstrate the USG belief that human rights issues are a legitimate topic of discussion. The United States is also not immune to criticism, as we recognize that human rights violations occur in all countries. Charge added that we saw the upcoming visit of U.S. Ambassador at Large for International Religious Freedom Hanford to Uzbekistan as an excellent opportunity to discuss freedom of religion, to start a dialogue in this important area of human rights. The Foreign Minister acknowledged Amb. Hanford's visit and said nothing to suggest the Uzbek Government was getting cold feet on this visit.

¶5. (C) Comment: Norov's comments are entirely consistent with the Uzbek modus operandi of blaming the United States for any and all problems in the bilateral relationship. They also reinforce that the Uzbek regime cares deeply about what U.S. officials say, or do not say, about it publicly. It is ironic that Norov's critique of U.S. human rights rhetoric came at the end of a long discussion in which Norov vehemently denied that a National Security Service investigator had severely beaten one of the Embassy's FSN employees during a criminal interrogation, even as photographs of our bruised employee lay before his eyes.

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